There’s a particular sound a finger bone makes when it breaks. Each finger is different, and if you smashed them one at a time in quick succession, I imagine it would sound something like a xylophone.

My middle finger blurted like an out of tune bassoon, and pain shot up my arm in a single bolt of red hot, agonizing lightning.

“Why are you following the girl?” the big beefcake said. He stuck his face into mine. He wore a five o’clock shadow that was veering towards dusk and smelled like cheap cigars and eggs.

“She’s beautiful,” I said. Which was true. Heather Tallent was the femme fatale of every bad noir movie ever made: slim, with flared hips and jutting breasts, long blonde hair that shimmered in the dark, and ice cubes for eyes. She was trouble, alright, and I hadn’t even gotten to meet her yet.

They had me tied to a chair with a small card table sitting in front of me. My one free hand was on the table and they used a hammer to break my finger. The hammer was on the floor now because the Brute, the other fellow who had been working me over initially, had set it there so he could punch me.

And he did.

The two of them loomed over me, their shadows stretching across warehouse floor. They were both big, and I mean giant, made of muscle and gristle.

“Answer the question,” Cigar and Eggs said.

“What do you care? What are you two, her bodyguards?”

Cigar and Eggs smiled. He had two black teeth and a third that was as brown as a turd. I couldn’t tell if they were rotten or just stained from the smoking.

“Sure we are,” he said.

“Listen, I’ve had about enough of this,” I said. “You two should cut it out or you’re going to get your asses killed.”

Cigar and Eggs burst out laughing. The Brute laughed, too, and his chuckle surprised me. It was high-pitched and squeaky, like he had a mouse stuck in his throat.

“No, really, guys, enough is enough. Let me go, lead me to Heather, and you might get out of this okay.”

The Brute cracked his knuckles. He actually cracked his knuckles. He bent down and picked up the hammer he used to smash my finger.

“Let me smash his dick,” he said.

Cigar and Eggs scratched his sandpaper face and seemed to consider it a moment.

“Nah, let’s break a couple more fingers, first, then we’ll get serious,” he said. “Unless you want to tell me who sent you? We could get it over real quick then.”

I whistled. It was loud and long, and if I had a dog it would have come running. Unfortunately, nothing happened.

“Hey!” I shouted. I looked past the two goons that were working me over. “You take too much longer and you’ll get in trouble with your boss.”

“Who the hell are you talking to?” Cigar and Eggs said. He looked around, stopping when his eyes fell on the Brute. “He gone crazy or something?”

All at once, the Brute let out the kind of scream you might hear if a horse got rammed up the ass with a Christmas tree. His eyes bulged and his arms flew out to his sides like he was trying to fly
away. He did lift up into the air, and I thought for a moment he really was flying, until I saw the bulky shadow behind him.

“About time,” I said.

Roger, who had slipped into the room in his usual way, all silent and stealthy, sneered at me. He was six and a half feet tall, with burnished skin, big green eyes, and packed with lean muscle. Roger wore a trench coat and fedora, with black slacks and a white dress shirt beneath. He was classy for what he was, I’d give him that.

He lifted the Brute over his head and threw him to the floor.

There’s a particular sound a spine makes when it snaps, as well. It’s kinda like a big tree when it gets struck by lightning and cracks in two. The Brute made that sound, and then he didn’t make a sound ever again.

Well, okay, he farted once, but it was hard to hear over Cigar and Eggs, because he started screaming like nobody’s business.

“Don’t kill him yet,” I said. “I need some information.”

“Maybe I should kill him so you can concentrate on your real work,” Roger said.

“Hey, I gotta pay the bills,” I said. I looked at Cigar and Eggs. “He’ll make it quick if you tell me where Heather is.”

He told me, right down to the room number.

Roger did not make it quick. Roger liked causing pain…

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